

Romilly Jenkins: *Byzantium: The Imperial Centuries (A. D. 610-1071)*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966. Pp. xii + 400.

This is a doubly significant book, for its own sake as a genuine contribution to the literature of Byzantine studies, and also as a means of bringing the work of its author to the attention of a broader public than he has previously had. Romilly T. H. Jenkins requires no introduction to specialists in this field. His unusually fine qualifications for Byzantine research include a thorough background in Classical literature so essential for the comprehension of the Byzantine intellect, a background increasingly rare among recent generations of scholars. To this he adds a most uncommon mastery of Greek language and literature — ancient, medieval, and modern — as an entity. Beyond these specialized qualifications, he writes with an elegant and finished style that places him, with Runciman, as among the last representatives of the great British tradition of *literate* scholarship.

This book grew out of a course of lectures given by the author at Harvard University in the spring of 1964. Its chronological limits and title are less arbitrarily chosen than might first be assumed. Dealt with here is what is sometimes called the "Middle Byzantine" period of the Empire's life. The period is begun when the Empire was ceasing to be merely a "Late Roman" relic, and was gradually developing an identity and character quite its own. The period is ended when Byzantium had decayed beyond hope of retaining a genuinely "imperial" power. Reduced to even simpler terms, this might be defined as "the period of the Theme System," when that system as an identifiable and viable organism, was the Empire's crucial institution and was, indeed, the key to its survival and success as an empire. The initiation of this system characterizes the beginning of the period, while the system's demolition in the runaway social and economic change of the 11th century ends the period by sounding a death-knell for the mature Empire's institutions and strength.

While this scope is thus fully defensible, how well it works depends on the way it is placed in context. The author does provide a sketch of the Empire's development and situation up to the accession of Heraclius (610). But the terminal-point at the Battle of Manzikert (1071), whether or not it is artificial as Jenkins admits, is certainly made to be too final. It is one thing to lose interest in full-scale detail after the death of the Emperor Basil II and merely to skin the events of 1025-1071. But to close shop abruptly at Manzikert and to give no hint of at least

the outlines of what came after, beyond a few retrospective comments in the concluding chapter, is to leave the non-specialist reader for whom the book was intended with a feeling of unsatisfied curiosity at the least and even, I suspect, of being cheated out of a relevant epilogue. Reference to the course of events after 1071 could add considerable illumination to the book's period of focus, not only by pointing out what happened to the shattered and compromised imperial system thereafter but also by suggesting the extraordinary vitality of Byzantine civilization, tenaciously refusing to be extinguished during the four centuries after its "imperial" role and institutional foundations had been eroded away. A short concluding essay to this point would give the book a valuable new dimension.

Nevertheless, within the chosen limitations, this book is a remarkable achievement. Setting aside the broader histories of the Empire as a whole — most notably Ostrogorsky's *tour de force*, as well as the uneven composites of *The Cambridge Medieval History* volumes, including the new "second edition" of its Vol. IV — it has no rivals in this specific comprehensiveness of focus. There are, of course, numerous specialized studies available on given Emperors or on other individuals, or on particular episodes or topics, all within this 6th-11th-century period. It is out of such diversified research and diffuse material that Jenkins has, with virtuosic powers of digestion, drawn a meaningful synthesis, one never before made in quite these terms. Besides the secondary literature, Jenkins also has the sources constantly at his finger-tips. In view of all that has gone into the book, it does seem a pity that the author has not given the reader more references to these materials, beyond the very bald or occasional notes printed at the end of each chapter. Presumably, Jenkins did not wish to duplicate the work of this kind already done in Ostrogorsky's book (to which regular citation is given for such guidance), but it would have been useful at least if the very short and general Bibliography at the end could have been amplified to list some of the most prominent monographic literature on the subject-matter covered by the book. And it seems to me that the non-specialist reader in particular would have been aided by the inclusion of a simple list of rulers and their dates.

A book with such scope and scholarly foundations naturally weaves its way through a great many issues of controversy. The author takes his stands with unequivocal boldness and independence. Those who recall Jenkins' sentiments — not entirely unnoted in these pages! — on the relationships of Byzantine studies and "Hellenism" will find familiar

echoes of them here (pp. 2, 24); though the name of Fallmerayer is never directly mentioned. Concomitantly, Jenkins gives strange emphasis to the role of the Armenians in the Empire's life (e.g., pp. 14, 18, 20). Even stronger assent is given the much-debated thesis of Slavonic contribution to the internal, especially the agrarian, revitalization of the Empire (pp. 12, 14, 39, 54, 123, 141, 343). On the treacherous, terribly complex question of the origins of the Theme System, while giving all due credit to Maurice as a precursor (p. 16), Jenkins largely accepts Ostrogorsky's line of thinking in ascribing to Heraclius the definitive initiation of the thematic reforms (p. 22). He also follows Ostrogorsky in accepting as settled the attribution of the so-called "Farmer's Law" to the reign of Justinian II (p. 53). He brushes aside with few reservations Grégoire's provocative attempts to rehabilitate Michael III (pp. 156-57), painting a largely traditional though unusually credible portrait of this Emperor as irresponsible and consistently dependent. Conversely, Jenkins gallantly attempts some vindication of his own, softening the black picture usually given of Empress Theophano (pp. 270, 276-77, 289-90, 293); though even he does not deny her reputed promiscuity, and, ironically, he cannot resist speculating (pp. 301-2) that the striking divergences of Basil II from the rest of his family in appearance and personality might suggest a marital digression by his mother with a Varangian guardsman! On paternity questions of another kind, Jenkins resists the trend of long speculation on the identity of the Princess Theophano by confidently pronouncing her a true daughter of Romanus II (pp. 294-95)!

There seem to me only two issues of debate on which Jenkins is ambiguous. He never makes quite clear (pp. 292, 308) whether he credits John I or Basil II with the formal abrogation of Nicephorus II's legislation on monastic properties. And, in his entirely neutral comments on the two Paphlagonian Emperors (pp. 341, 344) he avoids a stand on the challenge Bury had raised as to the validity of the admiration of Michael IV and vilification of Michael V by their contemporaries.

Beyond discussing the more obvious issues of debate, Jenkins fills his pages with imaginative interpretations and flashes of insight. One may not always agree with him, but the quantity and quality of such stimulating touches gives his book a particular value. Space does not permit reference to more than a few of most outstanding examples, though there are many more that tempt notice. Noteworthy is the unusually sympathetic portrait (pp. 146 ff) of Theophilus: one cannot help agreeing with Jenkins that an intensive study very much needs to be done on this able and interesting Emperor. There is also the very

perceptive exposition (pp. 335-36, 376-77) of the paradox of "Middle" Byzantium: the flourishing, especially in the capital, of a strongly anti-military, anti-war, "pacifist" outlook, as a counter-current to the aristocratic, expansionistic, and "imperialist" sentiments which triumphed during the Macedonian period and led the Empire out of a passively defensive stance to its peak of military glory. The victory of the former of these attitudes over the latter in the complacency of the mid-11th century in turn prepared the way for the Empire's disruption. There are debatable points in Jenkins' speculation (p. 366) on the course of the Empire's history had the Comnenian era begun definitely with Isaac I (1057-1059), instead of later, with Alexius I (1081-1118), but it does lead one to wonder if Manzikert and all it meant had to happen as it did. The author's mastery of Byzantine literary materials is displayed at many points, such as his discussion (pp. 156-57) of historical source reliability, but rarely with better skill than in his pointed characterization of Byzantine scholarship through an example of Eustathian commentary on Homer (p. 386).

Some of the book's most valuable pages are those devoted to the reign of Leo VI (pp. 212ff), an Emperor for whom the author obviously feels much sympathy, and with whose age his own specialized research has been particularly involved. Thanks to Jenkins' intimate knowledge of its sources, his is now the most thorough and illuminating account of the epoch to be found anywhere. There are some gaps: in the very pertinent references (pp. 205-7) to the emergence of the aristocratic problem, for instance, I miss any allusion to Leo's own legislation revoking peasant rights of *protimēsis* and easing the way for the growth of the large landed estates — legislation curiously counter to that of other Emperors of the Macedonian era. On the other hand, proper stress is put (pp. 207-8; cf. p. 261) on Leo's personal interest in and contributions to the development of Byzantine naval resources during the crucial maritime dangers of this age. And, based as it is upon original research on Arethas of Caesarea, Jenkins' provocative account (pp. 212-226) of the "Tetragamy" problem offers an entirely new, quite convincing picture of the episode, of its implications, and of the career of Nicholas Mysticus.

In so comprehensive and so boldly written a book, quite naturally, there are many interpretations that provoke disagreement. For example, Jenkins finds it "quite incredible" that Constans II "should have wasted time in forays into Macedonia to gain some cheap glory" against the Slavs in an age of Saracen menace (p. 39). The author's account of this

misunderstood Emperor is so sympathetic on all other aspects of his activities that it seems strange he should deny Constans credit for the latter's perceptive and responsible efforts to cope with the Empire's Balkan difficulties, gone from bad to worse since the overthrow of Maurice. Constans was the first Emperor who had, and who used, an opportunity to begin doing something about the Slavonic inundation; however scanty the immediate results, this initiative was, it seems to me, both logical and admirable. In another example, in assessing Basil II's motives for the conquest of Bulgaria (pp. 312-13), Jenkins may be right to discern the possibility of irrational personal reasons, but I wonder if he is correct in doubting the wisdom of the move in terms of expediency. Granted that Basil, in this as in his treatment of Armenia, showed no understanding of the value of a buffer state; an understanding available to us mainly from hindsight. But the assumption that by the late 10th century Bulgaria had become but a mere buffer state seems to me to overlook both the immediate stirrings under the Kometopouloi, especially the energetic Samuel, and at the same time the background of profound hostility, latent or open, between Bulgaria and the Empire since the days of Constantine V. There had been previous quiet periods in Bulgaro-Byzantine relations, but they had never guaranteed that Bulgaria would accept a permanently neutral or "buffer" status. Basil's decision to crush and annex Bulgaria, any personal considerations aside, was not only in conformity with all traditions of Imperial "irredentism," but would also have seemed pragmatically justifiable to him as well. And, however grim a business it proved, ascriptions of unwisdom belong perhaps less to his achievement than to the failure of his bungling successors to secure wisely what he had won. Finally, I think Jenkins has understated too much the Empire's sense of Christian mission in the pre-Heraclian period in his comments on the role of the Faith in the "Middle" Byzantine period, as distinguished from the preceding Late Roman (p. 379).

There are also, along the way, a number of omissions that might be questioned. cursory as it must be, might not his reference to the pre-Islamic Saracen frontiers (p. 29) have included some allusion to the very important Ghassanid and Lakhmid client powers maintained in those regions by the Romans and the Persians? In implying that "the very close relations" between the Empire and the Khazars began with Justinian II's alliance with them (p. 59), no account seems to be taken of the earlier compact made with them by Heraclius during his Persian campaigns. Given Jenkins' thoroughness at most points, omissions even of

trivia still appear needless: why no reference to Empress Helena's favorite, Basil Peteinos, in the personal government of Constantine VII and its aftermath? and why not include, if only in passing, the date of Empress Zoe's death (1050)? The most serious omission, however, seems to me to be a reflection of the author's reaction to the Empire's post-1025 decay: the glorious Platonic revival of the age of Psellos, entirely unmentioned here but a fundamental element of the Byzantine legacy to later generations that Jenkins otherwise so rightly eulogizes.

It remains to be noted that this is not only a learned and wise book, but a witty and well-written one. The author's prose is elegant, tidy, and carefully calculated, with constant care for the well-turned phrase. One might balk only at such exaggerated stylistic anachronisms as his giving British equivalents for Byzantine titles: as in references to the City Eparch as "Lord Mayor of Constantinople" (p. 60; cf. p. 339), or to the Empire's "Board of Admiralty" (p. 210). But, as for his wit, consult as but one example his digression on the etymology of the word *monoxylon* (pp. 161-62).

Yet, well-written as it is, this is not a book for light reading. It is true that, in his literate and urbane fashion, Jenkins is at his best presenting personalities. He has a clear sympathy for many of the individuals of this period, and in his understanding of human factors he produces some beautifully etched character sketches. But his is no "great-man" approach, and he does ample justice to broader currents. In fact, considering what else is available, one must recognize that Jenkins gives more detailed and thorough discussions of many of his topics than does any other comprehensive work covering this period. He asserts that he is writing "not for the scholar and specialist in Byzantium, but for the student and general reader." Yet, there is a slight incongruity in finding him, in his Preface, designating the often less thorough general works of Ostrogorsky, Bréhier, and Vasiliev, as well as the new *Cambridge Medieval History*, Vol. IV; as "not for beginners" in contrast with his book. (The more ironic is this if one notes, also, that his Chapter 23 [pp. 316-331] is, with only slight changes, virtually identical with his completion [pp. 180-192] of the unfinished Chapter IV in the new *C.M.H.* IV, 1, "Second Edition" begun by Grégoire).

In sum, I think Professor Jenkins has been too modest in gauging his audience. He has succeeded in his goal of writing a book "for beginners." At the same time, whether he so intended or not, he has produced a work of synthesis and interpretation that no specialist working

in this period will be able to overlook. This fact seems to me the true indication of Prof. Jenkins' achievement in combining his capacities as a scholar with the role of writing for the general reader.

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Stephanos I. Papadopoulos, *Ἡ κίνησις τοῦ δούκα τοῦ Νεβέρ Καρόλου Γονζάγα γιὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσιν τῶν Βαλκανικῶν λαῶν (1603-1625)*. [The movement of the Duke of Nevers Charles de Gongague for the liberation of the Balkan peoples, 1603-1625] Thessaloniki 1966, Institute for Balkan Studies, nr. 83. Pp. 290.

One of the important subjects in the history of the Balkan peoples under Turkish domination is their relations with the various rulers in Europe. As a result of these contacts it was hoped that a new, anti-Turkish, crusade would realize not only the ambitious—as well as adventurous—plans of these sovereigns, but could also open the way for shaking off the Turkish yoke. The hopes for the success of a European armed intervention were enhanced after the total destruction of the Turkish fleet at the so-called naval battle of Lepanto (October 7, 1571).

With the above in view, we find recorded repeated efforts on the part of the Greeks, and especially of the inhabitants of the rocky and semi-independent peninsula of the Mani (Maina). Although European diplomatic rivalries made the success of such movements utopian, they were usually encouraged, especially by Italian noblemen as well as by responsible leaders of great European Powers, e.g. the kings of Spain during the 16th and 17th centuries. Only the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648) and the religious conflicts, which began to convulse Europe, put an end to such plans.

Mr. Stephanos Papadopoulos, in his new book, relates the phases of the most noteworthy attempt which for a short time seemed capable of being realized and which kindled the hopes of the enslaved Greeks: the effort undertaken by the ambitious French nobleman Charles de Consague, Duke of Nevers, Rethel, Clèves, Mantova, and Montferrat. Charles believed himself to be a distant descendant of the Palaeologi and squandered his huge property on the preparation of an expedition against the Turks hoping to reestablish the Byzantine Empire and acquire the throne of Constantinople.